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Introduction: Understanding the Rhythm of History

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Introduction

Understanding the Rhythm of History

Of Life and History continues to provide a scholarly platform for students to engage in dialogues with the past. At the same time, the journal, owing to its young age, faces many challenges. First and foremost, it is not yet widely known on campus. Second, we are still tweaking policies and timeline for the journal publication hence the delay in publication this year. That being said, these challenges have also allowed the journal to grow and mature and have been a rewarding experience to be a part of this project.

2019 has been a particularly trying year for the students, faculty, and administrators at Holy Cross. In February students organized the largest protest in campus history, staging a peaceful sit-in outside President Borough's office, to demand transparency and the appointment of an external investigator to look into the various sexual misconduct allegations on campus. The faculty added their support to the urgency of an external investigation. In the midst of these *The Spire* regularly produced an impressive student led investigative journalism to further shed light on these difficult issues. As citizens and members of the Holy Cross community, it is important that we take note of these developments around us and speak out against injustice.

The essays in *Of Life and History* touch upon some of these similar issues of politics of gender and prejudice. Taken together, the essays highlight the limitations of understanding the past through a singular lens, particularly when we neglect the voices of the historical actors. *Problematic Modell for Success*, winner of the Edward F. Wall, Jr. Prize, by Joshua Whitcomb, questions the validity of equating the East Germany's communist government with Nazism. Whitcomb argues that such a simplistic plotline not only trivializes the experiences of East Germans, it lumps both communism and Nazism in the same category thereby failing to probe the layered experiences of the people under communism in the East Germany.

Victoria Tutino's *Stay at Home Soldiers*, teases out the intersection of gender and domesticity during the World War II. While historians have viewed the women, who entered the workforce during and after the WWII as pioneering feminists who broke the gender barriers, Tutino using the words of these women, shows they did not view themselves that way. Kiana Cardenas '19 makes a similar observation in her essay, *From "Companionate Wife" to Feminist Pioneer*. Jamaican activist and journalist Amy Jacques Garvey did not consider herself a feminist, even when she spearheaded women's empowerment through Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League. It is thus important that we seek to understand historical actors on their own terms.

My work, *Mysterious Moralism*, looks at how a dialectical relationship between action and intention of a historical actor can produce an intended development. Anthony Comstock's attempt to create a moral society through a regulation of sexual mores had an inverse effect, instead creating a more sexually open society that had far reaching consequences.

The pieces by Declan Cronin and the Aaron Wolf further emphasize the urgent need to correct scholarly and common biases in challenging the western centric understanding of progress and how our culture invents the "other". Together the essays in this volume highlight the living aspects of the past and along the way remind us of the constant need to apply corrective lenses if we intend to do justice to its nuances. At the least, they show that even when we think we may already know so much about the past, it still holds surprises and new discoveries once again make us humble about the intricacies of the past.

Of Life and History has been made possible by the generous support of History Department. In particular, the professors have been an invaluable resource; advertising the journal in their classes, encouraging their students to submit their works, and working with them during the editing process to fine tune the final drafts. Professor Sanjog Rupakheti, the faculty advisor for *Of Life and History*, has been a tireless supporter of this project since its inception. He has guided us, investigated new ideas with us, and allowed us the space to grow the journal. His professional insights into publishing academic works have been the backbone of our publication. The Editorial Board and their diligent, professional, and creative work ensured the quality of the journal. Without their perseverance, the journal would not have come together in its present form. I would also like to extend a thank you note to all those gave us the opportunity to consider their work for publication. While we could not publish all of them, we read each of them carefully and learned a lot from each submission. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help of Lisa Villa '90, Digital Scholarship Librarian, who has played a tremendous role in maintaining *Of Life and History's* online presence.

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